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V.—*Anglo-Saxon and Early English Pronunciation.*

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The Anglo-Saxons, Old Saxons, and Icelanders mark off their poetry into verses by the rhythmic repetition of letters. The most common form of it is alliteration, the repetition of the same initial sound in the first accented syllables of certain words.

The Common Narrative verse in Anglo-Saxon consists of two sections, and in a perfect verse two syllables of the first section and one of the second begin with an alliterating sound. If this be a consonant sound, it must be the same in all the syllables; following consonants of a combination need not be repeated, though *sc*, *sp*, and *st* usually go together.

It would seem then that alliteration may furnish some evidence of the pronunciation of the consonants in Anglo-Saxon and Early English, first, as to what consonants are sounded alike; secondly, as to the order in which the consonants of any combination were uttered.

Mr. A. J. Ellis in his great work on Early English pronunciation gives the sounds of all the letters in Anglo-Saxon and English, and wishes to bring together all the evidence connected with the subject, but neither he nor any of his critics, so far as I have seen, have directed their attention to alliteration. There are several combinations as to which the evidence from this source seems to be decisive against his representation of their sound.

1. The initial combinations *hl*, *hn*, *hr*, *hw*, he believes to have been pronounced *lh*, *nh*, *rh*, *wh*. But these are frequent alliterating letters all through the Anglo-Saxon poetry, and regularly alliterate with *h* alone, or with other combinations beginning with *h*. I will cite a single example from each of the three great sources, Beowulf, Cædmon, and Cynewulf.

- HL. *Wê purh ho'dne hige hláford pinne.* Beow. 267.
and tó heofnum up hlædre rærdon. Cæd. 1675.
hleatre behworfen, ah in hel e ceafl. Andreas, 1705.

- Hn. heord-weordunge hnáhran rince. Beôw. 952.
Gyld mé mid hylde pæt ic þé hneáw ne wæs. Cæd. 2823.
- Hr. habban on healse hring-weordunge. Beôw. 3017.
habban wolde, und r h ôf gefô. Cæd. 1360.
hlûde for hergum : hrefn weorces gefeah. Elene, 110.
- Hw. æfter hæleda hryre hwate Scyldingás? Beôw. 2052.
hæft mid hringa gespanne. Hwearf him eft nider. Cæd. 762.
hálig under hrusan, þe gé hwile nu. Elene, 625.

Such is the regular alliteration. There are a few lines in which *hw* may alliterate with *w*. Thus in Psalms, lxxxii. 10, the three words *wægnes : hweól :: windes* occur, and in Psalms, cvi. 28, *windes : hweoðu :: weorðat*, where *hw* may be the second alliteration in the first section; but it is to be noted that a very large number, more than a third of all the verses in Anglo-Saxon poetry, have but one alliterating word in the first section, and that these verses are therefore complete without counting the *hw* as a rime.

There are also a few lines having both *w* and *h* as possible alliterations to *hw*, where *w* is in the foot which oftenest rimes :

hwate Scyldingás : gewát him hám ponon. Beôw. 1601.

In the following verse there is no alliteration except between *word* and *hwile*, or very light particles :

Ne mágon gé þá word gesêðan þe gé hwile nu on unriht. Elene, 582.

It would be easy to emend the few lines of this kind; but they are not numerous enough to throw doubt on the current pronunciation, and I am inclined to believe that some of them do really represent an exceptional pronunciation of the poet or scribe who gave the poem its last touches. There are other indications that in some dialects *h* was going silent. A few verses are found where a word beginning with a vowel alliterates with one in *h* followed by a vowel :—

se þisne ár hider onsende. Andreas, 1606.
ealdum ceorle hondslýht giofan. Beôw. 2972.

See also more examples cited by Heyne, *Beowulf*, page 102, note on line 2930, none of which however are as sure as might be wished, as, indeed, is the case with those here cited. On the whole, the handful of irregularities in the riming of *hw* and *h* serve to assure us that the poets really followed the sound as they heard it.

Mr. Ellis also holds that in the initial combinations of *w*, the *w* is secondary ; that *wl*, *wr* were *l* and *r* labialized as in French *loi*, *roi*. But *w* is the alliterating letter :—

wēpnūm gewurðad. þá þár wlanc hæleð. Beow. 331.
ðæt þæt for wlence and for wonhygdum. Cæd. 1673.
wigspēd wið wrāðum purh þæt wlitige treð. Elene, 165.
Wederā peōden wræce leornōde. Beow. 2336.
on þas wer-peōde wræccan lāste. Cæd. 2822
and þa wig-præce on gewritu setton. Elene, 658.

To this evidence from Anglo-Saxon may be added that from Old Saxon and Old Norse ; all these combinations are common in the Heliand, and those beginning with *h* are common in the Edda, and the alliteration is the same as in Anglo-Saxon. Single examples will suffice. From the Heliand (ed. Heyne, 1866) :—

endi mid hlutrun trewun. Ward thó the hēlago gēst. 291.
holdan hērron, hnēg imu tegegnes. 2419.
an thea hēton hēl hriwig-mōde. 4448.
Ak thea mōtun hwerban an that himiles lioht. 1920.
umbi thiū word an gewinne : stōdun wlanka man. 3928.
theró wār-sagonó word thēm wrekkium sagda. 631.

From the Edda (ed. Lüning, 1859) :—

Hliðs bið ek allar helgar kindir. Völuspa, 1.
er vit hörmug tvau hnigum at rúnum. Gudrun, 3. 4.
Valði henni Herföðr hringa ok men. Vö uspat. 23.
Hvern létu þeir höfði skemra. Hýmiskviða, 15.

When we consider how important a part alliteration plays in the history of these tongues, how old and deep its work is, it seems necessary to admit that these peoples must have heard the alliterating sounds as first and most emphatic in their combinations, and that for all literary purposes, at least, transliterations of the old texts should preserve the priority of the rining letters.

In the Early English alliterative poems, as fast as these combinations change their pronunciation, the words with which they alliterate change. The *h* of *h/* and *hr* is no longer written, and *lord*, of course, alliterates with *l*, *ring* with *r*. *Wh* alliterates with *w* :—

And pere miȝte þow wite, iȝ þow wolt which þei been alle. Vision of P. P. ii. 44.
And with him to wonye with wo while God is in heuene. ii. 106.

I should expect the Anglo-Saxon alliteration of *hw* to be preserved in Old English of the northern dialect. In the latest alliterative poems we still find *wl*, *wr*, riming with *w* :

Lo, suche a wrakful wo for wlatsum deleȝ. Deluge, 307.

That I miȝht worchen his wille pat wrouȝt me to man. Vision of P. P. i. 82.

This brings *wr* down to Chaucer's time :

He was a wel good wright, a carpenter, Cant. Tales, Prologue. 614.

A similar examination of Anglo-Saxon and Early English alliteration assures us of the pronunciation of *cn* = *kn*, *gn*, and other initial combinations, about which however there is, I believe, no difference of opinion.

There is some question as to the sound of *c*, *sc*. *g*, *p*, *ð*, and the rune called *wen*, which the Germans generally transliterate by *v*, and the English by *w*.

It has been thought by some that *ce* was sounded like *ch*, that in *ceaster* (English *-chester*), for example, from Latin *castrum*, the *ce* is the Celtic notation for *ch*. But the alliteration shows that the poets did not discriminate it, nor *c* before *i*, *y*, from the regular *c* = *k* :

pet sið ceaster hider on pás cneorisse. Andreas, 207.

of Caldêa ceastre álêdde. Cæd 2200.

his cymê kalend ceorlum and eorlum. Menolog. 31.

and so often. But in *Piers Ploughman* such words are spelt with *ch* and alliterate only with each other or French *ch* :

For in charnel atte chirche cherles ben yuel to knowe. vi. 50.

And pat chaude or plus chaud for chillyng of here mawe. vi. 313.

while *c* before *e*, *i*, *y*, in French words alliterates with *s*.

Ac panne swore Symonye and cyuile bothe. ii. 168.

Sc when followed by a parasitic *e* is by many pronounced *sh*. But in Anglo-Saxon poetry all *sc*'s are alike :

Swá scridende gesceapum hweorfad. Traveler, 135.

scearp scyldwiga gescadd witan. Beow. 288.

while in Early English such words alliterate only with each other or with *s* :

I hope me in shroudes as I a shepe were. Vision of P. P., Prol. 2.

Mowe be siker pat her soule shall wende to heuene. i. 130.

There are some words in which *ge* represents *i*-consonant (English *y*) of other languages: *geong* has corresponding words in Sanskrit, Latin, Gothic, German, beginning with the sound *y*; in English it is *young* and in Anglo-Saxon it is sometimes spelt *iung*. But this word, like other similar words alliterates freely with all words beginning with *g*:

geong : *geardum* :: *God*. Beów. 13.
geógoðe :: *gledwóst*. Cæd. p. 221, 1.

And so other words, foreign proper names especially, even retaining their spelling with *i*;

Iacobes :: *góde*. Psalms, lxxxvi. 1.
Iordane :: *gréne*. Cæd. 1921.

In Early English a large number of words with the *y*-sound initial came in from the Norman and alliterated with each other. The Anglo-Saxon stragglers varied awhile, but finally went over to the Normans. It seems probable therefore that *g* in these words, as certainly in others, was intended to represent some palatal sound, either the same as *g* in *go*, or so like it as to have not been clearly discriminated from it.

It has been generally believed that *ð* represents the sonant *th* = *dh* which we have in *thine*, *other*, *smooth*, and the rune *p*, the surd in *thin*, *loveth*. But it seems to be admitted that so far as actual use in the manuscripts is concerned, they are mere calligraphic variations, like the two forms of Greek sigma; and we find that the words which in English begin with *dh* alliterate freely with those which begin with *th*: *píne* (thine) alliterates with *ge-peahtunge* (thinking), Psalms, liv. 13; *pæne* (that), with *purstige* (thirsty), Ps. lxi. 4; *ponan* (thence) with *Thrácia* (Thrace), Meters, 26, 22; and the like.

The regular shifting is from surds to sonants. Wherever the English has surd *th* the presumption is that the Anglo-Saxon also had it; but the English sonant is a natural weakening of a surd, and is of no great weight against the evidence of alliteration.

A surd and sonant do not combine in the same syllable. We may be sure that the ending of the third person singular of the indicative present of syncopated forms of surd roots is surd: *píneþ* (thinketh) and like words, end in a surd *th*.

There are other euphonic laws which indicate that *th* rather than *dh* was the common sound in Anglo-Saxon, final as well as initial. (See March's Comparative Grammar of the Anglo-Saxon, § 194.)

There is no Latin word in Anglo-Saxon poetry beginning with *v* or *w*. The general law of shifting is in favor of the sound of English *w* rather than the German, since the German *w* is a weakening of the English. The sonant continuous labial represented in Anglo-Saxon by *f* between two vowels, and which has changed to *v* in English, probably resembled the present German *w* = *bh*, an unstable transition sound from *b* to *v*.

Alliteration throws little light on the vowels. The poets prefer to have riming vowels differ. There seems little room for any wide divergence from the sounds accepted in Germany and America, and set forth with such accumulation of proofs by Mr. Ellis. The laws of change in vowel sounds make it doubtful whether the pure *a* sound ever obtained any general currency among people of Saxon traditions in words where we find it already weakened in Anglo-Saxon. The Normans perhaps did not adopt in their speech, and did not try to express in their spelling those modifications of the *a* sound which the Anglo-Saxons distinguished by *æ*, *ea*, *e*, *o*, *â*; but we know that these very tendencies to change *a* towards *e* on the one hand and *o* on the other have been active and modified a large part of the language, and it is likely that the progress has on the whole gone on ever since the Anglo-Saxon times, and that grammars and dictionaries which represent the Roman *a* as in general use in such words in the reign of Elizabeth, speak rather for the court and the college than for the folks at home.